

COTTON HILL STATION BRIDGE
(Charles C. Rogers Bridge)
Spanning the New River at WV Route 16
Cotton Hill
Fayette County
West Virginia

HAER No. WV-55

HAER
WVA,
10-COTH,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

National Park Service
Northeast Region
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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WVA
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Location: WV Route 16 over the New River
Cotton Hill
Fayette County, West Virginia

UTM: 17.4218260.487400
Quad: Beckwith, WV, 1:24,000

Date of Construction: 1927

Engineer: L.L. Jemison, State Road Commission

Present Owner: State of West Virginia
Division of Highways
Charleston, West Virginia 25305

Present Use: Vehicular bridge

Significance: The Cotton Hill Station Bridge is one of two bridges, located in Fayette County, crossing the vast New River. Its construction is a representation of the influence that local and statewide Good Roads Clubs had in improving the transportation system in Fayette County. This additional route, connecting US Route 60 with US Route 19, opened Fayette County to manufacturing and commercial opportunities not available previous to the construction of this safer and more expedient connector. It is also a representation of the influence of the Bureau of Public Roads in the design and placement of rural routes in the late 1920s.

Project Information: This project places a new structure downstream approximately fifty feet parallel to the existing bridge. Maintenance of traffic would be handled on the existing bridge during construction. Total length of the new bridge is 840 feet. The 1927 bridge will be demolished and removed by Division of Highways upon completion of the project.

Shelley Birdsong, Historian
West Virginia Division of Highways
Building 5, Room A-464
1900 Kanawha Boulevard, East
Charleston, WV 25305

Cotton Hill, located in the vast New River Gorge, is a small, dispersed town approximately one mile west of Beckwith, West Virginia along West Virginia State Route 16. The Cotton Hill Station Bridge and Road, also known locally as the Route 16 cutoff, the Beckwith Road, and the Chimney Corner Road, is located in Fayette County and crosses the New River. Situated in the southeastern section of West Virginia, the topography of the area is dominated by severe ridges, numerous waterways, and the vast New River which separates the county with an "impassible barrier which was not intended to separate counties, but to separate nations."¹ These features made transportation of goods and inhabitants difficult and often resulted in the establishment of small, isolated towns.

Although the Cotton Hill area had experienced an interesting history from the Civil War until the construction of the New River crossing in 1928, this HAER report centers on the crucial road building controversy between 1920 and 1930 and how Fayette County began improving its road system. The Cotton Hill Bridge was an example of 1920s federally funded road construction. The Cotton Hill Bridge and Road project, begun in 1926 and completed in 1928, illustrates the effectiveness of cooperation between federal and state authorities in order to improve transportation routes. It also serves as an example of the early public debates surrounding federally funded road construction, including court injunctions issued against the construction of the Cotton Hill Station Road and Bridge.

National Trends

The last decade of the nineteenth and the first two decades of the twentieth century represented a great change in Americans' expectations of their government and the role it should play in internal improvements. As the nation grew economically diversified, the need for better road transportation came to the forefront of American debate.

Transportation, and the ease with which one can move people and goods, has always been an important issue in society. Beginning with water navigation and the application of the steam engine, America began examining ways to penetrate the Allegheny Mountain chain. This movement was complemented with the construction of turnpikes and roads connecting towns with canals. Eventually the success of the railroad industry in the late nineteenth century developed into the most reliable, quickest, and cheapest form of land travel available in Fayette County.

Interest in hard surface roads, though, did not develop until after the invention, proliferation, and popularization of the bicycle in the 1880s and 1890s. This beginning interest was further fueled by the cheap mass production of automobiles in the 1900s. It was these two events which focused America's attention on better transportation routes.

Transportation in Fayette County Prior to 1926

The New River defined Fayette County, which was established in 1831. Effectively dissecting the county, the New created much debate over the establishment of the county seat and led to the citizens' appeals to the Virginia General Assembly to relocate the courthouse and government functions. The rift created by the gorge was best illustrated in a petition to the Virginia General Assembly in 1852. During that year, Henry Price, Colonel George

Anderson, Colonel Samuel Lewis, and others requested that the courthouse be moved to Spy Rock (now Lookout, West Virginia), and that the southern territory be returned to Raleigh County because of the terrain barrier.² After Virginia General Assembly denied the petition, the citizens of Fayette were left to devise a method of crossing the New River Gorge barrier.

Previous to the construction of the Cotton Hill Bridge, the citizens of Fayette County relied on crossing points to travel east to west. Motorists crossed either by ferries, the Gauley Bridge (over the Gauley River), or the Fayette Station Bridge (over the New River). Each of these alternatives were located on treacherous roadways that were punctuated by sharp mountain turns, mud bogs, or rock slides from the unstablized road cut. Considering these dangers, rarely did a citizen of Fayette County feel that the eight to ten mile circuitous routes, to go east or west were necessary to conduct everyday business in and beyond Fayette County. Therefore, the growth and economic development of the area was impeded by the substandard transportation routes of the county.

The first viable attempts to cross the New River were a series of ferries. Ferry travel was treacherous³, but used in West Virginia through the 1930s. The conditions of the river dictated the operation of the ferry. During periods of high water, ice in the river, or low water, a ferry would suspend operations until conditions modified. It appears that the first ferry to cross the New near Cotton Hill Station was Miller's Ferry, established between 1835 and 1840.⁴ It is at this point that the New narrows to a crossable point. This ferry was one of many transversing the gap of the New River. Other ferries in the area included the Townsend Ferry, Bowyers Ferry, and the Kanawha Falls Ferry.

The Kanawha Falls Ferry, located where the Gauley and New meet to form the Kanawha River, was the primary link for citizens moving east to west. This ferry operated between the James River and Kanawha Turnpike and the Giles, Fayette, Kanawha Turnpike, and began operation around 1800. The Kanawha Falls Ferry, first named Montgomery's Ferry, remained in operation until 1928. This date coincided with the opening of the Cotton Hill Station Bridge.

The Fayette Station Bridge, constructed in 1888, was the only bridge constructed and operating over the New River prior to 1928. This bridge connected both sides of the Gorge and was located between the coal towns of Kaymoor and Nuttallburg. This structure provided inhabitants with a much needed non-ferry crossing point. Closed in 1977 by the opening of the New River Gorge Bridge, the Fayette Station Bridge is located in what is today the New River Gorge National River.⁵

The Chesapeake and Ohio railroad provided a complete transportation route through the New River Gorge. Operation of the mainline began in the Gorge area in 1873 transporting people and goods. The railroad connected the coal towns along the New River and provided a quick and viable transportation system for the inhabitants of the area. Some of the towns connected by the C&O were Quinimont, Prince, Fayette Station, and Cotton Hill. The rail was the road in the New River Gorge.

The arrival of the C&O at Cotton Hill Station and the development of the coal and timber industries provided an impetus for growth along Cotton Hill Mountain. A post office was established at Cotton Hill in 1870, a town with an estimated population of eighty-seven.⁶

In 1882, the population of Cotton Hill was estimated at 250 people with daily mail deliveries, churches, a white and an African-American school, several mills, a surveyor, and several general stores.⁷ The population rose in 1892 to 360 inhabitants with the same conveniences.

The beginning of the twentieth century though marked the decline of Cotton Hill. Eventually residents moved to the larger towns of Fayette County such as Oak Hill, Mount Hope, Fayetteville, or Glen Jean, or moved because of a lack of work in the region. The post office was closed in 1920, yet the flag stop of Cotton Hill Station on the Chesapeake and Ohio continued into the 1950s.⁸

Citizen Involvement

It was the hardships created by substandard roads all over the nation which began citizen involvement in road building, road maintenance, and road location. As mentioned before, the bicycle (1880s-1890s) brought attention to the need for improved transportation routes, even in West Virginia. National support for the Good Roads Movement began with organizations such as the League of American Wheelmen⁹ and later the National Grange Organization. At the turn of the century, this doctrine was adopted and continued by the federal Office of Public Roads "who played a large role in convincing Americans to support better rural roads as a social necessity after 1905."¹⁰

Publications produced by different organizations claimed good roads would raise land values, open new markets, provide access to manufactured goods, end rural poverty, increase political participation by farmers, and improve education.¹¹ This "gospel of rural road improvement"¹² was the driving force behind the early Good Roads Movement and was later adopted by the federal organizations funded to examine road conditions nationwide.

The West Virginia Good Roads Association was organized in 1903. This statewide interest group organized local clubs to develop a general interest in road conditions and the possible legislative solutions.¹³ Supported by the West Virginia Board of Trade, local governments, and the Board of Agriculture, the Association issued a resolution in 1908 approving the creation of a State Inspector of Highways, endorsing the establishment of a Department of Roads building at West Virginia University, and urging the cooperation of the Association's members with officials in respect of "looking to the betterment of existing roads and the intelligent and economical construction of permanently good highways throughout all parts of West Virginia."¹⁴

A later report prepared by the State Board of Agriculture stated, "[f]or a great many years the organization of farmers known as the Grange has been working for the improvement of the public roads. . . . If the bicycle has done no other service to mankind than to show us the necessity for better roads it has abundantly paid for its cost."¹⁵ Public interest, documented by the efforts of state and national clubs and private citizens, led the West Virginia legislature to create a centralized highway operations in 1913. This was the moment when the West Virginia Good Roads Clubs began addressing the issues which would change the facets of this state unlike any previous era.

In the above referenced State Board of Agriculture report, essays were compiled

explaining the need for good roads. In some instances, the authors felt it necessary to attribute most of the social and economic ills of West Virginia to the lack of good roads.¹⁶ Localities had several effective representatives trying to improve their infrastructure through political pressure. This trend continued to be successful, as attested to by the passage of state and national legislation providing funding for mass road construction. Until this time, a majority of the road building burdens and decisions were placed upon the local government or the county court.¹⁷

Another government sponsored activity was the establishment of Good Roads Days in 1914. Designated as May 28 and 29th, this public holiday was created to "have every able bodied citizen labor upon the public highways of the State during these two days, and that the work performed be of a kind that will make a lasting and permanent improvement, such as road grading, ditching, culvert building, graveling, dragging, etc."¹⁸ Women were urged to help the laborers and "feel it their duty to participate in the work. . . I [Governor Hatfield], therefore, call upon them and their various organizations to prepare dinners and to see that they are served to the laborers along the way, thereby showing their loyalty and interest in this great cause."¹⁹ The activities and participation exhibited by West Virginians encouraged state legislators to begin participating in the developing federal aid road system.

State Legislation

West Virginia redefined its involvement in the construction of roads in 1907 from a purely local issue to the eventual development of a State Road Commission. The passage of the Road Amendment in 1920 continued the State's efforts to improving the transportation routes. In 1920, West Virginia citizens passed The Road Amendment referendum. In the biennial message of Governor John J. Comwell on January 12, 1921, he said of the amendment:

In adopting the Good Roads Amendment to the State Constitution, by such an overwhelming vote, in the face of a vigorous campaign against it, the people have plainly shown they desire a State Road System and that they want State highways constructed. The people will not be satisfied with a make-shift measure, with an evasion. They want roads before the natural resources of the State are all exhausted and the sources of taxation dissipated.

At the same time it is highly important that the program undertaken be a conservative one, based on common sense and business methods. Every safeguard should be employed to bring sound business judgment into play and to keep graft and incompetence out.²⁰

This call to rally behind the wishes of the people was answered in successive years after the amendment's passage. By 1923, 3500 miles of road were designated or planned in a state road system and 749 miles were taken over for maintenance.²¹ It is from these beginnings of the State Road Commission that cooperative efforts were begun with the Federal agencies to use matching funds to construct and improve roads in West Virginia. This is also the new

system under which the State Road Commission built the Cotton Hill Station Bridge and the subsequent Cotton Hill Road.

Planning A New Route

According to the 1919 West Virginia Geological Survey, the roads in Fayette County were described as follows:

In Fayette County the public highways consist of largely unimproved dirt roads and bridle paths. With one or two exceptions the existing wagon roads are generally narrow, rough, and poorly graded, many of the streams not being bridged, thus making it difficult and somewhat hazardous to travel over them during the winter season.²²

The complete road mileage of the county, as recorded by the State Road Commission in 1919 was 751 miles.²³ As the automobile became prevalent in the county, bonds were passed by magisterial districts in order to begin the construction of hard surfaced roads. The major travel roads or Class "A" roads in Fayette were the James River and Kanawha Turnpike (1824) and the Giles, Fayette, Kanawha Turnpike (1848). The Chesapeake and Ohio mainline and other small railroads were the most reliable transportation in Fayette County from its completion in 1873 at Hawks Nest, West Virginia until the mass road building projects after World War I.

It was this above described hardship that fueled a strong public reaction to the construction of state roads in Fayette County during the 1920s. In 1926, the *Fayette Tribune* published an article addressing the citizens' frustrations surrounding roads. According to the article, seventy-five citizens appealed to the State Road Commission urging a more intensive road building campaign in Fayette. Supporting several proposed roads, including Cotton Hill, the citizens were promised nothing, but the Commission "gave close attention to [their] demands."²⁴

The Cotton Hill Station Bridge and road planning began in 1926 under the auspices of the State Road Commission. Citing the substandard Midland Trail, which traversed the treacherous Cotton Hill Mountain and excessive cost of upgrading the existing route, the Commission began consideration of a new route crossing the New River. The existing route was described as follows in a local newspaper; a motorist following the Midland Trail between Gauley Bridge and Kanawha Falls drove upon a nine foot bituminous macadam surface of poor alignment, which contained "numerous sharp and dangerous curves, has a dangerous grade crossing over the C&O mainline, and several switchbacks. For these reasons, the state road commission authorized the survey of an alternate route. . . ."²⁵ Located between Chimney Corner and Beckwith, West Virginia, the road had an estimated construction cost of \$206,000. The cost of the road was to be half State funds and half Federal aid. The local newspaper attributes the location of the proposed route as being dictated by the federal involvement.²⁶ Yet, with the push of the Good Roads Movement to improve transportation routes and a federal mandate to create better and safer roads, the

choice of a new route bypassing Cotton Hill Mountain appeared logical.

Citizens' Reactions

Citizens began voicing their dissatisfaction with the new route through the local newspapers. C.A. Boggess, a Charleston engineer and former employee of the State Road Commission²⁷, reported in the Fayette paper, "[t]here is neither need nor necessity that the Cotton Hill road be taken over by the state road commission. . . and none to warrant even a survey of the proposed road."²⁸

In the same article, Boggess leveled accusations of profiteering against the engineers in charge of the Cotton Hill project. He reported that "William Brewster, federal engineer, [and other state road engineers], have acquired an interest in a tract of 200 acres of land, on which it is said they hope to establish a summer colony of Fayette and Kanawha County folks of sufficient means to pay a handsome profit on the investment they and their associates have made in the tract."²⁹ This alleged profiteering created many problems for the State Road Commission and the Cotton Hill project.

Stories of profiteering by federal and state officials began a flurry of citizen activity for and against the new road and its designated alignment. In June 1926, several citizens of the Nuttall district filed an injunction in the Kanawha County Circuit Court to block the letting of the Cotton Hill Road contract. Citing a lack of good faith, the suit outlines several Fayette County roads allegedly designated as state routes by the State Road Commission and improvement agreements entered into with the county court, yet never completed. Continuing their complaint, the citizens claimed that the Cotton Hill Cutoff accommodated low amounts of local traffic and its prohibitive cost and limited use disqualified its construction over the other routes listed. According to the State Road Commission's official statement, the other routes described were not designated state routes.

The first injunction was dismissed by the Circuit Court. Yet the citizens pressed on in their endeavor taking the issue to the Supreme Court of West Virginia. The Supreme Court issued a temporary restraining order and motions were scheduled to be heard on 3 July 1926. The Supreme Court also issued a writ of mandamus ordering the State Road Commission to answer the accusations of the concerned citizens. The actions required the contract for the Cotton Hill Cutoff Road to be delayed until the situation was resolved by the courts.³⁰ Recognizing this delay, those citizens who agreed with the construction began to voice their opinions not only in the local papers but also in the letters to the Court.

Reaction to the injunction filed in the Kanawha County Circuit Court was swift from the business concerns of Raleigh and Fayette Counties. Beckley businessmen voiced their opinions in the July 9, 1926 issue of the *Fayette Journal*. Refuting the record given by the local newspapers, the Beckley Chamber of Commerce and its road committee published in the *Fayette Journal*, "As matters now stand a Fayette County connection with the Midland Trail is almost essential to this section. The project proposed would eliminate Cotton Hill and the Kanawha Falls Ferry, both undesirable, and would not be displeasing to motorists going west from here."³¹

In Fayette County, the Mount Hope Business Men's Club recorded their opinions by

publishing their reaction to the case in the *Fayette Journal*. Stating that the petitioners were not from Mount Hope, and claiming to represent a majority of citizens in town, the Club published a final pronouncement:

Whereas, the need of completion of this work at the earliest possible moment is imperative and Whereas, this application for an injunction would serve no good purpose, but only delay action on badly needed road work, [resolve the injunction against the Cotton Hill Cutoff], is not in the best interest of the majority of the citizens of Fayette County, or citizens of the State of West Virginia and should be denied and a copy of this resolution be transmitted to the Honorable Judge of the Circuit Court of Kanawha County.³²

Considering the ease with which Mount Hope businessmen and others from the eastern part of Fayette County could access the Midland Trail from the new road, the cutoff would best serve their interest, the interest of the towns, and thus the interest of Fayette County.

The West Virginia Supreme Court initiated a special term on July 20, 1926 for resolution of the mandamus, after the oral arguments on the appeal from the plaintiffs responding to the previous Kanawha Circuit Court action.³³

In September 1926, the legal obstacles placed in front of the Cotton Hill construction were removed by court order. The court ruled that state road funds could not be redirected to county district road improvements and there were no contracts or binding agreements to convert the alternative roads into state routes. The accusations of profiteering leveled against the engineers in charge of the Cotton Hill Cutoff route were found unsubstantiated. The court did issue a remark to the allegations though in stating "the engineers in the employ of the commission, its servants and agents should be extremely careful to avoid just public criticism in the use of information obtained by reason of their official position. Criticisms of this character tends to weaken the effectiveness of the commission and to hamper it in its important statewide work."³⁴ With the legal issues resolved, the construction of the road and Cotton Hill Station Bridge began.

Construction of Cotton Hill Station Cutoff and Bridge

The State Road Commission commenced with the contracting and construction of the road between Chimney Corner and Beckwith, West Virginia. The road construction had to be complete before bridge construction could begin in order to reach the bridge site. The road was contracted to A. Keathley at a low bid of \$97,871 for the three and one-half mile route. The connector route was constructed from both sides of the river to recover the time lost by the earlier litigation. With the road completed in Spring 1927, the construction of the bridge was let to bid and begun in the Summer of 1927.

The State Road Commission designed the Cotton Hill Bridge in Charleston. Since this project included funds from the Bureau of Public Roads, Department of Agriculture, all plans had to be approved through this entity before let for bid. After federal approval, the State Road Commission began the advertisement for bids. Detailed in the bid announcement were

the materials specifications that the company selected would provide for construction of the Cotton Hill Bridge. These included the following:

- 424 cubic yards of Class A Concrete in superstructure
- 42,760 pounds of "Deformed Steel Bars" complete in place
- Structural Steel, Cast Steel, and Sheet Lead Plates
- as per plan complete in place.
- 3080 pounds expanded metal in place
- 2430 pounds galvanized curb guard in place
- 4350 square feet of "gunite" in place³⁵

The West Virginia State Road Commission advertised for bid on the construction of a bridge across the New River near Beckwith, Fayette County, West Virginia. Five bridge companies from Ohio, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Indiana,³⁶ submitted their prices for the construction of an 812 foot riveted structure across the New River and the Chesapeake and Ohio mainline. The Cotton Hill Station Bridge and Cutoff plans were developed by the State Road Commission in 1926. The superstructure developed by the State Road Commission design dictated the use of two plate girder bridges, one 49 1/2' and one 70', three 185' nine panel Pratt deck trusses, one 66' Warren deck truss, and two 30' I-beam bridges for the superstructure which would be suspended approximately 100 feet above the surface of the New River. Two plate girder bridges were designed to extend across the C&O rails. This was a common practice during the era of the steam engine. Through trial and error, engineers learned that plate girder bridges resisted the extreme heat and moisture expelled by the steam engine. The roadway width was to be twenty feet, with a steel lattice balustrade guard rails. There were no sidewalks designed for the structure. The company with the lowest bid of \$83,830.80 was the Vincennes Bridge Company from Vincennes, Indiana.

The Vincennes Bridge Company was established in 1899 by Frank and John Oliphant and Jacob L. Riddle. The company centered its business on full-service bridge building pursuing Highway Commission contracts through the 1920s.³⁷ Considered one of Indiana's "most successful bridge-building firms, the company's annual production reached 1,200 spans by 1911 with bridges in "at least eight southern and western states before 1920."³⁸ In 1927 Vincennes had two bridge projects in West Virginia. This appears to be indicative of their earlier successes in Indiana during the 1910s. This company continued bridge building until 1951, when the Oliphant brothers dissolved the company.

The substructure was to be constructed out of concrete, and was let under a separate contract to the BM Chaplin and Company of Morgantown, West Virginia. This company constructed the abutments and piers for the bridge structures across the New River, a total of two abutments, six piers and one bent. All of the substructure was constructed with concrete and formed by falsework frames placed in the New River by Chaplin.

Between 1926 and 1929, these two companies managed to cross the unpredictable New River. The implications of this crossing to the residents and the potential economic development of this Fayette County region were recognized for the first time; residents

would have a new and safer New River crossing. Previous to the construction and completion of the Cotton Hill Bridge, there was only one other bridge crossing and a ferry for residents to reach Fayetteville and points east of the gorge.

Several suppliers, in two states, supplied different materials for the construction of the sub and superstructure. According to Division of Highways records, Pennsylvania steel fabricators provided the bridge superstructure for the Cotton Hill Bridge including Jones and Laughlin Steel and Bethlehem Steel. Vincennes fabricated only a portion of the bridge in its own fabricating facilities. The materials used in the construction of the substructure included local and state wide resources. The State Road Commission laboratories in Morgantown, West Virginia tested all the construction materials used in the building of this bridge. Substructure materials were provided by the Huntington Gravel and Supply Company of Huntington, West Virginia and West Virginia Sand and Gravel Company of Charleston, West Virginia, which included "Ohio River" brand sand and gravel. Paint, used to protect the bridge members after completion, was provided by the Phelan Faust Paint Manufacturing Company, a St. Louis, Missouri company, Wilson Paint and Glass Company of Cincinnati, Ohio, and Detroit Graphite Company of Detroit, Michigan.³⁹ All of these materials and parts were transported over the newly constructed road connecting the Cotton Hill Bridge to US Routes 19 and 21 or over the Chesapeake and Ohio mainline which had been in operation in the Gorge since 1873.

As the bridge began taking form, the local newspapers began reporting the progress of construction to the public this bridge would serve the most. As the substructure was completed, the newspaper announced the hiring of Vincennes and the projected completion date of January 1928. The importance of this road was now recognized by a majority of Fayette County's citizens. In the November 1927 issue *Fayette Journal* reported the connection of the center bridge span by Vincennes' workers. "After a month's feverish and anxious labor the Cotton Hill highway bridge drew a sigh of relief Sunday when the last beam was laid on the center span connecting with the middle pier over the main channel of New River."⁴⁰ The river's high waters threatened to wash out the falsework protecting the substructure of the new bridge. Yet, even mother nature was no threat as the span was connected and this easier route became a reality for the county.

The labor employed for the construction of the bridge began as the regular work force pieced the structure together. Other operators participated in the construction of the bridge throughout the process. As the need for completion closed upon the crews, Vincennes increased their bridge construction work force.⁴¹ The expedition of construction enabled the bridge to be completed only one month past the requested January 1928 date stipulated by the State Road Commission.

On February 27, 1928 the Cotton Hill Bridge and Road were opened for traffic. The new cutoff eliminated the Kanawha Falls Ferry and connected the two prominent turnpikes in the county. The route, once completed, reduced the mileage it took a driver to travel between Kanawha Falls and Fayetteville by ten miles. While westbound drivers' mileage increased by two miles, the route bypassed Cotton Hill Mountain and reduced travel time.⁴²

Once the bridge was completed and opened, news and controversy about the new route

disappeared from the headlines of the Fayette County papers. The final cost of the entire route was approximately \$350,000, half of which came from the Bureau of Public Roads' federal aid program. The Cotton Hill region did not experience a great deal of growth after the completion of the bridge. Most small manufacturing disappeared from the area prior to the bridge construction. What the bridge provided though was a safer, more expedient route for commercial traffic and local traffic travelling between US Route 60 and US Route 19. This improvement in transportation attracted other industries to the Gorge area as early as 1930.

The dangerous currents of the New River were changed in 1930 with the construction of the Hawks Nest Dam by Union Carbide. The production of hydroelectric power, facilitated by the rechannelizing of the New River, continues today and provides power to an alloys plant upstream from Cotton Hill. The dam was designed to hold an estimated 11,000,000,000 gallons of water.⁴³ The river, while the dam is in use, appears to be a safe, unobtrusive stream, perfect for fishing and other activities. The locals call this state "the Drys." When the dam is opened though, the river returns in all its fury to remind everyone of the barrier that generations had to cross to conduct everyday business.

Touted as one of the best built bridges in the county, Cotton Hill Bridge never underwent extensive maintenance or alteration. The original decking was repaired occasionally and repainted only once, according to Division of Highway records. In 1991, the Division of Highways decided to replace and demolish the Cotton Hill Bridge after successive periodic inspections listed numerous structural deficiencies. Most of these deficiencies would cost more to repair than in it would cost to replace the structure.

After 1928, Fayette County never had more than two New River crossings available. Until the completion of the New River Gorge Bridge in the 1970s, the Cotton Hill Station Bridge and the Fayette Station Bridge served as the east west connectors for Fayette County and symbolized the beginning of growth throughout the region as goods and services could be moved more conveniently. The Cotton Hill Bridge was an example of federal and state cooperation and the result of citizens' initiative to improve the transportation systems in their county. This voice was demonstrated by the involvement in local and statewide Good Roads Clubs, appeals by Fayette County citizens to the State Road Commission for more paved roadways, and the failed injunction by citizens opposing the construction of the new route in 1927. The result of the construction of the Cotton Hill Road and Bridge was the beginning of mass changes and improvements provided by that new cooperation between organizations, both the private and public sector.

The West Virginia House of Representative passed a resolution (HCR 46) on March 6, 1992 to rename the Cotton Hill Bridge to the Charles C. Rogers Bridge in honor of a distinguished black military leader from Claremont, (Fayette County) West Virginia.

ENDNOTES

1. W.T. Lawrence, Letter to author, 3 November 1994. W.T. Lawrence is a published author on some aspects of Fayette County history.

2. *Ibid.* In 1837, Thomas B Hamilton requested the Fayette County Courthouse to be located at Hawks Nest, West Virginia. This is according to research Mr. Lawrence completed at the Library of Virginia in Richmond, Virginia.

3. In February 1926, the Kanawha Falls ferry operator lost a court case involving injury of two passengers and the loss of their car during a river crossing. The amount of settlement awarded by the court was \$2500. "Jury gives \$2500 Damage Against Kanawha Falls Ferry," *Fayette Tribune*, 3 February 1926, p. 1.

4. Communication from WT Lawrence to author, essay dated 3 November 1994.

5. *West Virginia State Gazetteer and Business Directory 1892*, (Chicago, IL: R.L. Polk and Company, 1892), p. 140.

6. John Cavalier, *Panorama of Fayette County*, (Parsons, WV: McClain Printing Company, 1985), p. 10.

7. *West Virginia State Gazetteer and Business Directory 1882*, (Detroit, MI: R.L. Polk and Company, 1882), p. 126.

8. James E. Reed Jr., "Whatever Happened to the 'Fast Flying Virginian'?", *Wonderful West Virginia* 54 (1990) 2: p. 18.

9. The League of American Wheelmen was a group of organized bicyclists formed in 1880. Though they organized under the same good roads premises as the National Grange, they were not supported by farmers throughout the country. Farmers feared the Wheelmen's urban improvements platform and the possibility of having their taxes raised for improvements most would not enjoy.

10. Bruce E. Seely, *Building the American Highway System Engineers as Policy Makers*, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1987), p. 35.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

13. West Virginia State Board of Agriculture, "Report of the Good Roads Committee," *Report Number 11 of the West Virginia State Board of Agriculture*. (Charleston, WV: The Tribune Printing Company, 1908), p. 53.

14. *Ibid*, p. 56.

15. State Board of Agriculture, Report Number 11, p. 2.

16. *Ibid*.

17. The construction of tumpikes by state supported joint interest companies in the nineteenth century appear to be the only exception to this fact. In West Virginia, all the roads, except for the Midland Trail, National Road, and the Staunton Parkersburg Tumpike, were locally designed and funded.

18. West Virginia State Road Bureau. "First Annual Report of the State Road Bureau", *Public Documents of West Virginia, Volume 4, 1913*, (Charleston, WV: Tribune Printing Company, 1915), p. 237.

19. *Ibid*, p. 236.

20. "Biennial Message of Governor John J. Comwell to the West Virginia Legislature January 12, 1921", *Public Documents of West Virginia, 1919-1920 Volume 1*, (Charleston, WV: Tribune Printing Company, 1921), p. 47.

21. "First Biennial Message of Governor Ephraim F. Morgan," *Public Documents of West Virginia to the Legislature of 1923, Volume 1*, (Charleston, WV: Jarrett Publishing Company, 1924), p. 30-31.

22. Ray V. Hennen, *West Virginia Geological Survey, Fayette County, 1919*, (Wheeling, WV: Wheeling News Lithographic Company, 1919), p. 15-16.

23. *Ibid*, p. 16.

24. "Delegation Pleads for Fayette Road Action," *Fayette Tribune*, 27 January 1926, p.

1.

25. "Cotton Hill Road Routes Are Compared," *Fayette Journal*, 3 September 1926, p.

4.

26. "Cotton Hill Depot Route Midland Trail Link," *Fayette Tribune*, 26 May 1926, p.

1.

27. "No Personal Interest Served in Road Matter," *Fayette Journal*, 23 April 1926, p.

2.

1. 28. "New Light on Cotton Hill State Road Route," *Fayette Journal*, 16 April 1926, p. 1.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. "Beckley Favors Connection," *Fayette Journal*, 9 July 1926, p. 3.
32. "Mt. Hope Favors Cotton Hill Road," *Fayette Journal*, 2 July 1926, p. 1.
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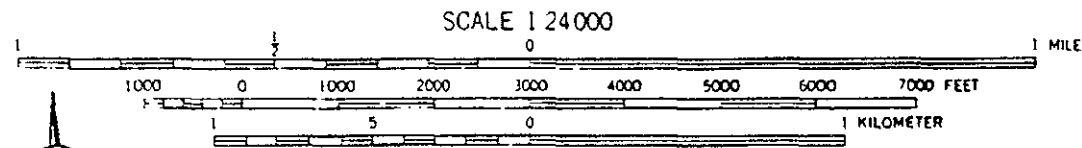
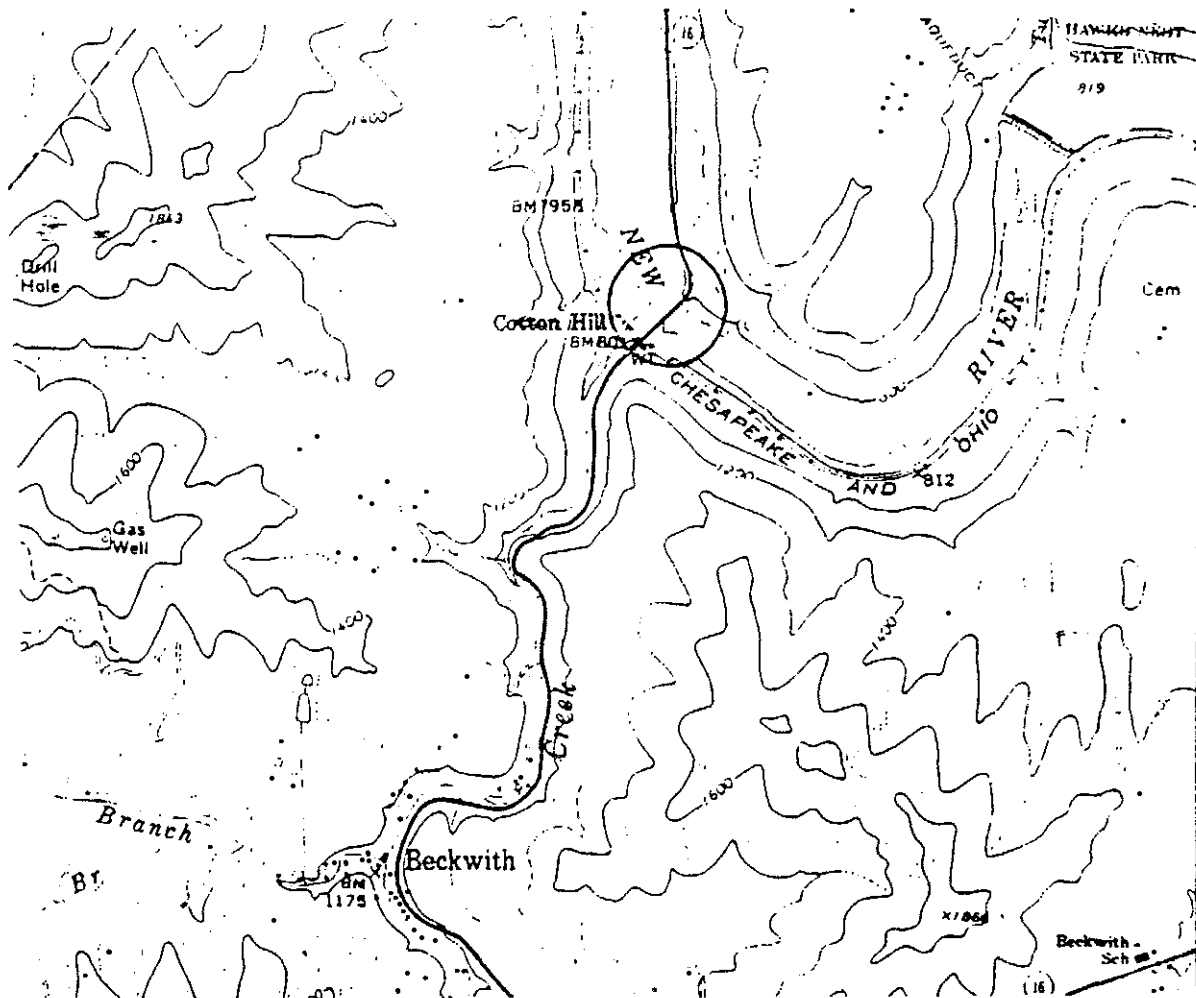
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(Charles C. Rogers Bridge)

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United States Geological Topographic Quadrangle, 7.5"
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Showing the Location of the Cotton Hill Station Bridge